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EXCAVATIONS IN A TERRACE
ON THE SOUTH-EAST VELATOURI AT THORIKOS
AND THE DISCOVERY OF A SLAVE BURIAL¹

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In the course of the systematic and intensive survey of the southern half of the (greater) Velatouri by Ghent and Utrecht universities (2012-2015), it was noted that the lower south-east slopes of the hill, bordering the coastal road and near a Late Classical/Hellenistic structure,² yielded indications for the presence of a hitherto unknown necropolis: fragments of lekythia, a fragment of a funerary stele and a rectangular cutting for the placement of a stele.³ A subsequent geophysical survey (Ground Penetrating Radar) by Lieven Verdonck of Ghent University in 2013 showed the presence of anomalies in the subsoil, possibly

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¹ Parallel to the survey, the excavations lasted from 15-27 July 2013 and were supervised by Thomas Pieters during the first week and Floris van den Eijnde during the second. Roy van Wijk acted as field assistant during both weeks; the following students of Ghent and Utrecht Universities helped in the excavation and finds registration: Alyssa Boecksteys, Lieke Boerstra, Lex Bronkhorst, Simon Claeys, Ine Depaepe, Silke De Smet, Marinde Hiemstra, Merel Kusters, Caroline Landsheere, Mounir Lahcen, Els Meijer, Lieke Meulenbroek, Bram Mulder, Margit Pothoven, Maarten Praet, Willem Van Aenrode, David van Alten and Sarah Van Wylsberghe. On behalf of the Ephorate, Maria Skalia supervised the works as *epoptria*. We thank the staff of the Ephorate of Antiquities of East Attica and especially Dr. Eleni Andrikou, Dr. Eleni Assimakou, Dr. Dimitra Kai, Dr. Andreas Kapetanios, Dr. Anastasia Lazaridou, Dr. Maria Mexi, and Dr. Katerina Petrou. The project's logistics have been in the hands of Guy Dierkens, aided by Inge Claerhout. Our thanks go also to Prof. Panagiotis Iossif and Prof. Jan Driessen of the Belgian School at Athens. During our fieldwork and study campaigns we were kindly hosted in the Technological Park of Lavrio, for which we thank the Mayor, Mr. Dimitris Loukas. Funding for the campaign was provided by Ghent University, Utrecht University, the Belgian School at Athens and various private donors; we extend our warmest thanks to all of them. Andreas Kapetanios kindly read a first draft of this paper and suggested additional publications.

² Λιαγκουρας & Κακαβογιαννης 1972.

³ See also J. Bergemann, elsewhere in this volume.

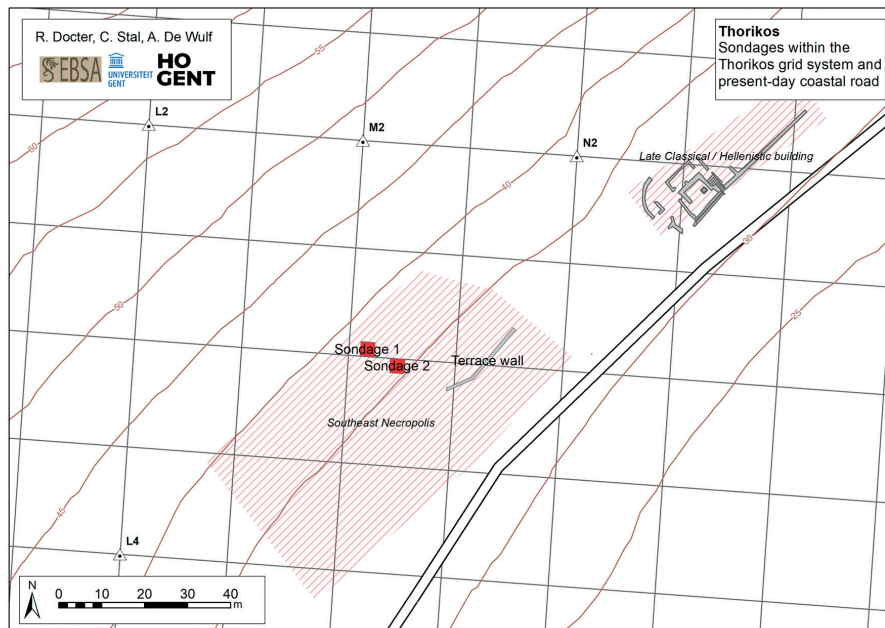


Figure 1. Position of the two sondages in relation to the Thorikos grid system, the present-day coastal road, and the Late Classical/Hellenistic building (C. Stal).

related to funerary structures.⁴ The same year, Ghent and Utrecht universities conducted two small trial excavations in two sondages initially measuring 2×2 m within Macrosquares M2 and M3 to establish the nature of these anomalies (**Fig. 1**).⁵ The westernmost sondage (1) was located in M2, while the easternmost sondage (2) was located in M3 (**Fig. 1**).

In one of these trenches (Sondage 1), the anomaly proved to be the stone infill of a grave, covering an inhumation of a male adult buried without any grave gifts apart from a concentration of sea shells and land snails.⁶ The finds in the stratigraphy of both trenches yielded a probable chronology for the burial in the 6th or 5th century BCE.⁷ It could be shown that the grave had been dug in an agricultural terrace dating to the Archaic period at the latest. The poorly preserved skeleton has been studied by Francis Janot and Perrine Munaro of

⁴ See Verdonck *et al.*, elsewhere in this volume, esp. fig. 7.

⁵ After excavation, both sondages were filled in, first with geotextile, then with a thick layer of sieved soil and finally with stones that had been kept aside from the excavation.

⁶ The land snails, however, may not be offerings; see L. Karali, elsewhere in this volume.

⁷ See Docter *et al.*, elsewhere in this volume.

the University of Lorraine, who observed that the man (age 35-40) carried out heavy physical labour during his lifetime.⁸ In combination with the absence of grave gifts, one may interpret the burial to have belonged to a slave.⁹ The radiocarbon analysis of a bone fragment provided a chronology falling within the Hallstatt Plateau (probably ca. 540-400 BCE),¹⁰ hence independently confirming the results of the pottery analysis. Since a cemetery in the area had been postulated on the basis of the preliminary survey results, the soil from all contexts was sieved, also with the intention to detect traces of possible funerary activities among the graves, but nothing of the sort could be noted.¹¹ Stimulated by the discovery of the grave, the geophysical research was extended in 2014 with a large-scale geomagnetic survey by Maarten Praet of Ghent University.¹²

Excavation and stratigraphy of Sondage 1

A layer of loose, brown-grey topsoil was removed down to ca. 0.30 m below the surface (contexts T13-1-1, T13-1-2 and T13-1-3, **Fig. 3**). The soil was characterised by many worn and water-rolled sherds, dating from the Subgeometric to the Late Classical period, though the soil appears to have been reworked until early modern times (see also Sondage 2).

Below and down to levels of ca. 0.50-0.60 m below surface, the soil consisted of layers of compact rich, reddish brown earth with plentiful stone rubble and pottery throughout (contexts T13-1-4 to T13-1-10). Sherds date from Subgeometric to Late Classical and are characterised by calcareous concretions with many recent breaks due to the compactness of the soil, necessitating the use of pickaxes. In it, a noticeable concentration of stones extended from the south-west to north of the trench (context T13-1-5; **Fig. 2**), possibly representing the remnants of a terrace or boundary wall.

Below this, an even harder, compact layer of the same reddish brown earth was present throughout the trench (context T13-1-11), ultimately leading down to bedrock in the northern part of the trench. Within this layer, which contained Subgeometric to Archaic sherds, a concentration of rocks appeared in the south-east corner, presumably belonging to a stone infill of a grave (less likely a small tumulus), and human remains belonging to a single individual, lying in

⁸ See Janot & Munaro, elsewhere in this volume.

⁹ See Lauffer 1979²; Morris 2011, on enslavement in the Lavriotiki.

¹⁰ See Janot & Munaro, elsewhere in this volume.

¹¹ This kind of investigation of activities within a cemetery remain unfortunately very rare, see Docter 2010.

¹² See Verdonck *et al.*, elsewhere in this volume.

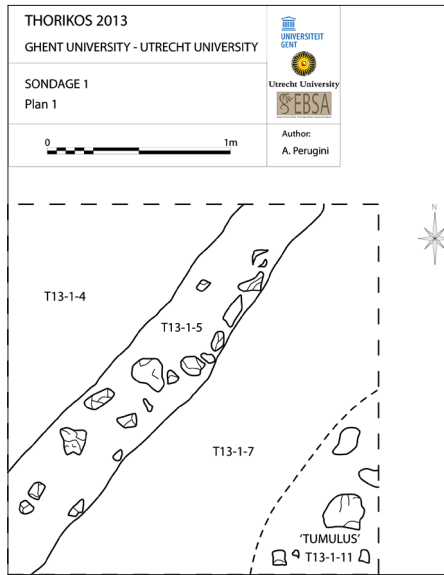


Figure 2. Plan of Sondage 1 after removal of topsoil (A. Perugini).

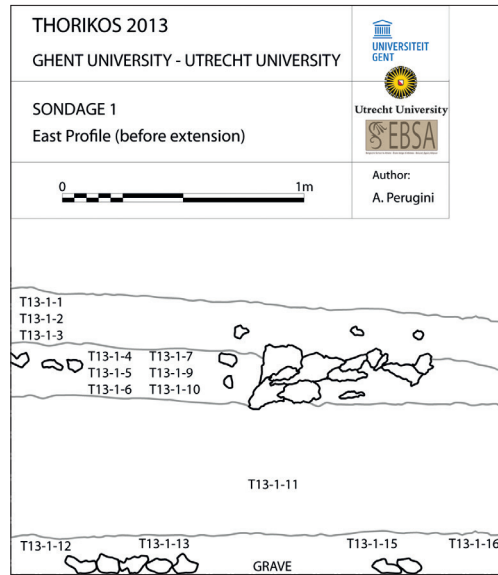


Figure 3. Sketch of east section of Sondage 1, before extension (A. Perugini).



Figure 4. Plan of the grave in Sondage 1 (A. Perugini).

supine position, were soon discovered underneath. The stone infill also seems to appear on the GPR reading of the wider area.¹³

In order to uncover the infill in its entirety, the trench was enlarged by removing a stretch of 0.50 m along the southern and eastern baulks in the south-east corner without further stratigraphical distinction to the level of the grave (context T13-1-14). As expected, the stone infill clearly extended into this area. What little finds were recorded from this context date from the Archaic to the Classical period.

Underneath the stone infill, large rocks surrounded the human remains in a roughly oval manner, lining the inside of the grave and corresponding with the upper layer of rocks (the stone infill; **Figs. 3-4**). The skeleton was found in a north-east/south-west orientation, with the head to the south-west. The inside of the grave within the confines of the inner lining of rocks was dug as several separate contexts (T13-1-12, T13-1-13, T13-1-15 and T13-1-16), beginning at a depth of 0.70 m down to ca. 0.90 m (**Fig. 3**). The grave fill contained Subgeometric to Archaic/Classical finds (7th to 6th/5th century BCE).

The human remains were pedestalled for photographing on the penultimate and lifted on the last day of excavation (**Fig. 5**). All soil connected with the remains was sieved for bone fragments. Fragments of a purple substance and some shells were also found during this process. Soil samples were taken at every 0.10 m. The skeleton measured 1.60 m, and appears to have been that of a male adult of ca. 35-40 years old.¹⁴ A large concentration of sea shells and land snails was found on and directly adjacent to the skeleton, in particular near the skull.¹⁵ This is unusual in the light of finds elsewhere, such as for instance in 32 burials in the Athenian Kerameikos where sea shells accompanied (very young) children and females, rather than males.¹⁶

Excavation and stratigraphy of Sondage 2

A layer of loose, brown-grey topsoil was removed down to ca. 0.50 m below the surface (contexts T13-2-1 to T13-2-5; compare Sondage 1). The soil was characterised by many worn and water-rolled sherds, dating from Subgeometric to Hellenistic/Roman, reworked until early modern times since its lowest level (context T13-2-5) contained a glazed early modern sherd.¹⁷

¹³ Verdonck *et al.*, elsewhere in this volume, fig. 7,1.

¹⁴ See Janot & Munaro, elsewhere in this volume.

¹⁵ See Karali, elsewhere in this volume.

¹⁶ See Stroszek 2012, esp. 65-66, 70.

¹⁷ See Docter *et al.*, elsewhere in this volume, cat. 40.



Figure 5. View of skeleton in Sondage 1, from the south-east (F. van den Eijnde).

Underneath, a layer of very compact, reddish brown soil was uncovered (T13-2-6, T13-2-7, T13-2-8, T13-2-9 and T13-2-10; compare Sondage 1). Finds are characterised by calcareous concretions with many recent breaks due to the compactness of the soil and the use of pickaxes in the excavation. There seems to be a shift in the chronological range of the finds towards the lower part, above bedrock. This would imply that the Subgeometric finds from the sequence above may be later inclusions, eroded from higher up the Velatouri or entered into the soil matrix by way of manuring activities. Only the possible Subgeometric finds in the lowest level (contexts T13-2-11, T13-2-13 and T13-2-15), as well as the possibly Late Geometric find in context T13-2-12 (but that may be Archaic),¹⁸ would constitute an earlier deposition.

The main feature in this trench is a short (retaining?) wall running north-south along the west side from the south-west corner (T13-2-12; **Figs. 6-7**). The wall, if it may be called thus, is a loose conjunction of smaller and larger stones, the largest measuring some 0.40 × 0.25 m. The most coherent part of this conjunction measures 1.40 m (north-south) by 0.50 m (east-west) and extended from 0.20 m below surface levels down to ca. 0.65 m. Finds from this structure date from Late Geometric to Archaic (8th to 6th centuries BCE).

¹⁸ See Docter *et al.*, elsewhere in this volume.

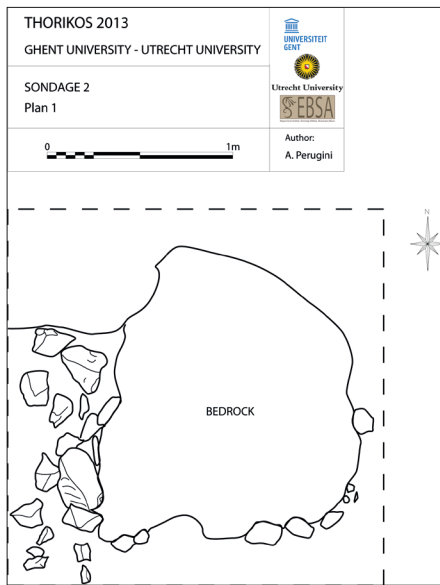


Figure 6. Plan of Sondage 2, final stage (A. Perugini).

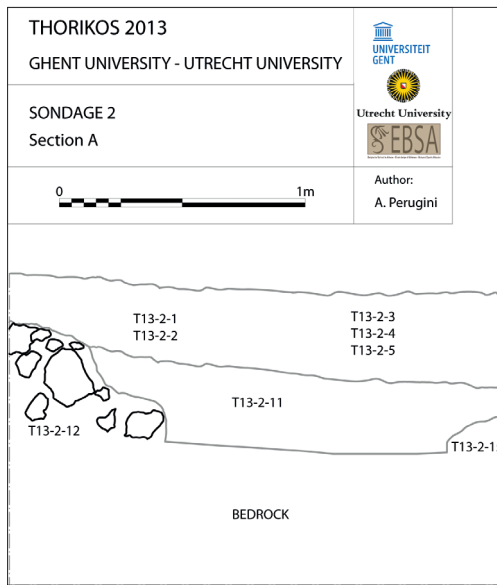


Figure 7. West-East section through Sondage 2, looking north (A. Perugini).

Many more stones and small pebbles were found directly towards the east (context T13-2-11) inside a stratum accumulated against the wall (**Fig. 7**), presumably representing rock-tumble from the wall itself; this layer contained finds dating from Archaic to Classical (6th to 4th centuries BCE). Underneath this loose, stone-filled layer (context T13-2-11), bedrock was encountered at 0.55-0.70 m below surface. A roughly circular cutting was detected in the bedrock, presumably natural, although toward the north-west, human intervention cannot be excluded.

Discussion

The adult male burial in the south-east sector of the Velatouri contributes to a new understanding of this part of the Archaic and Classical deme. The burial accords well with findings from the Thorikos Survey Project. A large concentration of rooftiles was found in close vicinity, to the west and slightly higher up, and reinforces the hypothesis that this part of the Velatouri hill was settled during the later Archaic and Classical period.¹⁹ The fact that such tiles were

¹⁹ On the survey, see van den Eijnde *et al.* 2018; van den Eijnde *et al.* forthcoming; van den Eijnde *et al.*, elsewhere in this volume (survey).

only encountered in the ploughsoil layers, dated to early modern times,²⁰ suggests that they do not originate from the lower layers connected with the grave. Instead, the general chronology of the tiles (6th-4th century BCE) may perhaps imply that burial and settlement were contemporary. Prior to the burial, it seems that the lower slopes near the coastal road had been used for agriculture on terraces. The makeup of the two sondages consisted of many small to medium-sized stones and small, heavily weathered sherds covered with calcareous concretions. Their presence and their state of conservation may have been the result of manuring in combination with ploughing. The chronology of these sherds points to the Early Geometric-Middle Geometric I, Subgeometric and Archaic periods; they may have originated in the Early Iron Age settlement at the top of the Velatouri, the acropolis of Thorikos.

The interpretation of the grave as a burial of a slave is based upon the combination of two elements. In the first place, the complete absence of gravegoods (except for some sea shells and land snails) is remarkable since most graves in Attica and at Thorikos in particular contained at least some ceramic vessels.²¹ Secondly, the study of the bones by Francis Janot and Perrine Munaro showed evidence of intense physical activity during the lifetime of the individual. Similar indications of the effects of repetitive actions on skeletons from Late Roman burials at Thorikos and Panormos have equally lead to their interpretation as slave burials.²² Previously, Maria Oikonomakou suggested that the graves of a 5th century BCE necropolis (mainly clustering between 470 and 440 BCE), excavated some 3-4 km west to south-west of Lavrio, may have belonged to mining slaves.²³ If the interpretation of the Thorikos grave as one belonging to a slave is correct, one should consider the possibility that it may not be that of a slave active in the silver mines, since the evidence for pre-4th century BCE mining and processing of the ores on the Velatouri hill proper is not very strong and, moreover, debated.²⁴ But slaves were of course active in other areas than silver exploitation.

In 2019, a team of the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, directed by Johannes Bergemann, resumed the investigations of the lay-out, chronology and character of this South-East cemetery within the framework of the five-year project (2018-2022) of the Belgian School at Athens.²⁵

²⁰ See Docter *et al.*, elsewhere in this volume.

²¹ Ian Morris (2011, 183) has warned against the sole use of gravegoods in determining whether one might be dealing with a slave burial but, after statistically evaluating the evidence for Athens and Attica, he concluded that “overall, the commonsense assumption that mining slaves received fewer grave goods than free Athenians is apparently justified”.

²² Λάγια, Γιαννακκοπούλου & Καπετάνιος 2015.

²³ Σαλλιώρα-Οικονομάκου 1985; 1986; Morris 2011, 180-184.

²⁴ Mussche 1998, 62-63; Docter & Van Liefferinge 2010, 54-56.

²⁵ Bergemann 2018.

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